



## St John Lutheran Church

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Text: Matthew 4: 1-11

Theme: The Temptation of our Lord

**"Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil"** (Matthew 4:1). Even **after forty** days and forty nights, doesn't it seem like this temptation would have been easy for Jesus? **After all, He** is God. He walks on water and multiplies food and raises the dead; surely a little hand-to-hand combat with this already-doomed serpent will mean an easy victory!

**But Jesus' Divinity**, His Divine Nature, will not allow this temptation to be **"a walk in the park."** Even though **He** is "in very nature God," **Jesus does not consider His co-substance with God and His "equality with God something to be grasped"** (Philippians 2:6). **Jesus' Divinity**, with all of its abilities, does not matter to Him... **but** He considers it very lightly, willingly withdrawing from its use and **"being found in appearance as a man"** (Philippians 2:7). **This truly is** the Creator of all things that suffers the devil's enticements and torments, but all of the Creator's mighty power now lies dormant within Him, and He refuses to exercise it in His own defense. **Jesus faces the full blast and fury of His temptations in exactly the same way you face yours... in complete weakness, in poverty of spirit, and in the palpable desire to have that which is not His to have.** **"After fasting forty days and forty nights, He was hungry"** (Matthew 4:2), and yet, bread raised up from stones was only a word away. **There is a purpose** for what Jesus is doing here!

**If it should** have been so easy for Jesus to resist temptation on account of His divinity... **it should** be equally easy for you to resist yours. **You are, after all, participants "in the divine nature"** (2 Peter 1:4), as St. Peter says. **You are described** throughout the Scriptures as **"a holy nation"** (1 Peter 2:9), as having been **"enriched in every way"** and not lacking **"any spiritual gift"** (1 Corinthians 1:5, 6). **You are not** only of the same human flesh and blood as your Lord... **but you** are also in possession of the same Spirit, the Holy Spirit, the Spirit that gives gifts **"of power and of love and self-discipline"** (2 Timothy 1:7). **So... if it should** have been for Jesus easy to resist temptation... **it should** likewise be easy for you.

**But resistance is** not easy for you, and Bible verses will only prove **THAT** fact which you already and inwardly know... **that "death came to all men, because all sinned"** (Romans 5:12); and that you and I, along with all other men, **"are without excuse"** (Romans 1:20). **Temptation is not** easy to resist because each temptation that you suffer is uniquely crafted for you... **whether** it is the physical lusts of youth... **the material lusts of middle age... or the old-age self-satisfaction of having made your mark or of having taken care of yourself all these many years. Temptation is not** easy to resist because the Tempter never tires of piercing you with his arrows. **In fact, as I grow older, I find the arrows only become more deadly... and my desires only more twisted, more insidious, and more damning. Temptation is not** easy because I want to sin, even though my sin

could destroy my family, my home, my work, my congregation, and my fellow believers. **My sin is** something that I just cannot shake! **My knowledge and** love for the Lord grows...**my** faith even grows by God's Grace...**but my** sinful flesh remains!!

**Do not think** for a moment that Jesus' Divinity makes His temptations any easier to bear than yours. **"He was tempted in every way, just as we are-yet was without sin"** (Hebrews 4:15). **There may be** a lot at stake when you are tempted, but infinitely more is risked when Jesus is tempted. **This temptation recorded** in this Gospel is a matter of life and of death...**your** life, **and your** deliverance up from death. **"Death came to all men, because all sinned"** (Romans 5:12), but Jesus does not need to sin in order to die. **He is already a dead man, and not because He is a sinner! His conception in** Mary's womb already connects Him so intimately and inseparably and completely to you that you will be more than sufficient to impose upon Him the death penalty. **"Death came to all men, because all sinned"** (Romans 5:12) and death comes to this Man because all others apart from Him have sinned. Jesus this knows before He ever enters the wilderness. **Jesus came to** do what Adam could not do...**Jesus came to** do what you and I cannot do...**face** the temptations of the devil and to do so perfectly without sinning... **without getting** suckered into doing something that we know we should not do!!

**Mark very carefully** tells us how it is that Jesus endures and overcomes the great desires that Satan flings upon Him. **He does** not rely on His Divinity because God does not need to be saved...God does not need to be redeemed... **if He** did, this whole episode would be a sham and you would have no reason to trust and cling to Him... **no reason** to believe that He has made Himself like you in every way. **Jesus does not** rely on His Divinity... **but He** does not rely on His humanity, either... **because** this, too, would give Him unfair advantage over you because He is without sin...**He is** perfect in every way. **Jesus engages the** devil and fights His own temptations with **exactly the same tool, exactly the same power, exactly the same infallible,** protective and life-sustaining source that He has also given to you... **that being** the Holy Word and Promise of God. **He relies on** nothing else because nothing else shall prevail but the Word and Promise of God. **Nothing is more powerful! Nothing else** is needed!

**"Tell these stones to become bread"**

**"It is written."**

**"Throw yourself down from this high place."**

**"It is written."**

**"Bow down and worship me-just a little bow would be fine."**

**"IT IS WRITTEN....."**

**Dear Friends, what** greater tool...**what greater** power is available to you anywhere in creation? **You do not** rely on yourself when tempted any more than Jesus relies upon Himself. **You do not** exercise your great powers when faced by the devil and his lies, any more than Jesus exercises His.

**You are to endure** your temptations just as Jesus endured His... **Not as if** it is a walk in the park, but in the realization of the life-and-death consequences involved. **You are to overcome** your temptations in exactly the way that Jesus overcomes His...**not** in self-confidence or personal strength, or your own good works... **but** only and solely by clinging to the Word and promise of God. **You have been** given God's Word and nothing is more powerful...**nothing** is a more effective weapon against evil. **This is why** St. Paul refers to God's Word as the "Sword of the Spirit!" This is why in his Great Hymn, **A Mighty Fortress**, Dr. Luther says of the devil, "**one little Word can fell him.**"

**The one and only** difference between Jesus' temptations and yours is that Jesus succeeds where you incessantly fail. **Ironically, His success** arises from the same source as your failure. **And what I mean** is this: **You love you**, more than anything else, and that is what makes you so willing to give in to your personal temptations. **There is no** such thing as committing yourself to doing better... **or** staying focused... or ceasing to sin... **because** in the deepest moment of your temptation, you realize that what you want and desire is more important than anything else. **Your love for you**, empowers your complete capitulation to your temptation and your sin.

**Jesus' success arises** from the same source as your failure. **You do what** you do because you love you... **Jesus** does what He does because Jesus loves you. **Jesus loves you** more than anything else, and His love for you compels Him **to endure, to fight, to overcome**, and finally **to win** for you the victory. **For Jesus, there** is no possibility for failure because in the deepest moment of His temptations... **He** realizes that what you need is more important than anything else. **And nothing will** prevent Him from loving you and for providing you with exactly what you need.

**It is not** an easy thing for this Divine Son to subject Himself to such weakness and torture as is described in today's Gospel. **It is not any** easier for Him to proceed up out of the wilderness and into the waiting city in which He will be condemned to die. **It is not** an easy thing... **but** He willingly and cheerfully takes up the task because you mean more to Him than the full exercise of His deity... **more than** His own, unimaginable sufferings... **more than** His own death.

**Theologians sometimes** contemplate the question of whether or not Jesus could have sinned in this or any other temptation. **If you say**, "No," Jesus could not have sinned because He is God and God is perfect... **then** you misunderstand the burden of this event. **His deity, as** I have already said, could not come into play if Jesus is to be for you, everything that you are not... **if He** is to die for your sins and be raised for your justification. **You may, however**, confidently confess that Jesus could not, or rather, would not fall prey to Satan's lies. **He could not** and He would not because His love for you compels Him not to. **It is not** by reason of His strength that He endures... **but rather**, by reason of His weakness, that He becomes for you the very source of your eternal life. He did for you what you could not do for yourself... **and** then having faced temptation perfectly...**Jesus** then offers Himself as the perfect sacrifice for your sins.

**The Temptation of** our Lord is a great lesson. **It is a** lesson in how He wants us to face temptation...**it is a** lesson in the Power of the Word of God which is given to us as our sure defense...**it is a** lesson in what Jesus endured for us...**it is a** lesson in our Lord's great perfect Love for us... **In the Name of the Father and of the Son + and of the Holy Spirit...amen.**

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Rev. Eric M. Christiansen

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